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Method for Producing Franking Markings

B Background of the Invention
1. Field of the Invention

The invention relates to a method for producing franking markings by printing on a provided support material.

2. Description of the Related Art

In the past, postage stamps and comparable franking markings have been offered and sold by the vendor always as finished products for use by the customer but, with respect to their graphic design and artistic/image-related contents, unchangeable by the customer.

The postage stamp business in the past has therefore been inaccessible with regard to many new technologies and business applications. There was also no possibility to react as fast as possible to special events in society, in the business environment, and in leisure time.

B Summary Of The Invention

It is therefore an object of the present invention to eliminate the aforementioned disadvantages and to propose a method and a device which make it possible for the user or customer to participate in the design of franking markings, in particular, in the case of postage stamps.

The method and the devices should be designed such that they can be operated and used market-oriented as industrially useful means by the vendors of franking markings.

According to the invention this object is solved in that a text, selected from individual suggestions and/or individually designed, and/or an image or images are generated by input means and transferred onto the support material for printing.

In view of the inventive concept and based on the general knowledge in communication and data processing, far-reaching technological applications within the context of the present invention can be realized and the gained advantages relative to the prior art can be determined in retrospect.

The present invention does not concern a presumed illegal violation of the design of franking markings made available through the vendor but instead provides an interactive design possibility for the customer officially offered by the vendor during the production of franking markings or a series of same or different franking markings.

In contrast to the edition number of conventionally produced, i.e., finish-printed postage stamps of a certain franking value produced outside of the vending location, a series is a smaller edition number.

The term franking marking is meant to include primarily postage stamps or similarly designed adhesive labels with an official character or a character having a similar effect (coupons, admission ticket and the like of private companies, for example, freight companies, retail businesses, sporting facilities and the like).

This method according to the invention and the device according to the invention combine for the first time in the field of franking markings the always present aspiration of the customer in regard to individuality and interactive design with modern technology that is easy to operate.

The following economically important and technically realizable advantages are provided by the method according to the invention and the device, in particular, in comparison to the known franking marking creations or dispensing devices:

- a) Firms or persons can employ the official franking marking as an individual advertisement carrier;
- b) The potent users can address current events with a speed that has not been available in the past and, for example, by means of a letter or a card with an individually designed postage stamp with the imprint "Congratulations on ..." participate in the event.
- c) A completely new collection effect is made available for the postage stamp collectors. They can, inter alia, collect postage stamps with designs created according to their imagination or with photos of animals.
- d) The vendor can make available a portion or the entire freely designable space of a postage stamp. Products of the post office thus have access to an attractive advertisement platform.

- e) A quickly invented slogan, coupled with a voluntary or automatically calculated surcharge on the postage stamp, allows a directed financial support.
- f) The method according to the invention as well as the corresponding device can be coupled without problems with the Internet and are thus available for a worldwide use. This means, it is possible to design on a home PC one's own stamps and to produce them with authorization through the external post office facility.
- g) The owners of devices according to the invention, in general, post offices or post office substations, can make available, for a fee or without a fee, these devices as an attraction to their customers for designing their own franking markings.

B *Brief Description Of The Drawing*

The method according to the invention and the device will be explained in more detail in the following with the aid of one embodiment. It is shown in:

Fig. 1 a front view of the device according to the invention;

Fig. 2 a side view of the device illustrated in Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 a surface of a touch screen in an exemplary fashion with selectable texts in combination with an image and the image of a person;

Fig. 4 a surface of a touch screen with selectable text proposals and images; and

Fig. 5 one embodiment of the device as a self-service postage stamp vending machine.

B Detailed Description of Preferred Embodiments

The Figs. 1 and 2 show a device 20 for performing the method according to the invention which is usable as a postage stamp vending machine and is designed for producing individually designed postage stamps.

The device is comprised of a housing 9 in the form of a cylinder slantedly cut at the top and providing an interactive operating surface. The foot of the housing 9 has a step 7 for children. The step 7 can be moved into the interior of the cylinder. Material and production technology for the cylinder body 9 can be freely selected in a wide range by a person skilled in the art. In the slanted interactive operating surface a touch screen 1 (contact monitor) or a similarly acting operating device is installed. The lens of a digital camera 2, whose viewing orientation and, in any case, angle of view are preferably adjustable, projects above the operating surface.

In the interior of the housing, inter alia, a computer 3 in the form of a PC is provided which is connected with the touch screen 1, the camera 2, the printer 4 as well as coin changer or cash register 10. The printer 4 receives paper that is fresh or pre-printed or clean and/or provided with an adhesive layer at the back from a paper roll 5. The coin changer 10 is supplied via a coin or

bill feed slot 8 and returns change via a postage stamp and/or change dispensing location.

All aforementioned elements (housing 9, step 7, touch screen 1, digital camera 6, printer 4, computer 3, and cash register or coin changer 10 and the like) are in themselves commercial products. Since they are generally known and because of the pertinent experience with regard to the use and mutual circuit connections via interfaces which generally are defined internationally or application-specifically, these aspects are not explained in more detail.

The manufacturing method according to the invention can be realized as follows. The site authorized for vending franking markings prepares a basic design of the postage stamp. It comprises the entire surface area available for the franking marking as well as additionally the legally required information with regard to value, identification, and safety elements and the like and has a free field, i.e., a field made available for printing individual information. The size of this field or these fields is not relevant. It can also comprise one or several edges of the franking markings so that, for example, an already pre-printed object or slogan that is no longer desired can be simply cut away (compare touch screen of Figs. 3 and 4), wherein the remaining part, i.e., the actual "official" postage stamp, can still be used as official legal tender.

Before using the device, the customer inserts or pushes a certain amount into the coin or bill slot. This amount is indicated on the touch screen under the display "Credit". In the alternative, the

customer may also use a credit card, the device being designed for its use. Now the customer selects or determines via the menu displayed on the touch screen the franking value of the franking marking to be produced, the number of markings to be printed, and one or more of the provided slogans. If no such slogan pleases the customer, according to a particular embodiment, the customer can call up a keyboard on the screen and can enter his own text via the keyboard. It is also conceivable that he enters via Internet or hardware data carrier (diskette or the like) his own text/image into the PC. The latter displays this text/image on the touch screen. The PC displays the selected text/image on the available space within the basic design of the postage stamp displayed on the touch screen. Should the customer be satisfied with the result of his own creation/composition according to the monitor representation, he will press the zone of the touch screen identified by the lettering "Print" and the printer prints the desired number of created postage stamps. Otherwise, the customer is provided with editing functions via software.

Instead or in addition to a slogan or otherwise produced images (monochrome or color in digital technology), the customer can also produce on site a photo of himself, of another person, or of an object. He controls as desired the viewing orientation of the camera optic provided in the device via the camera image shown on the touch screen and then takes a picture by actuating the camera symbol provided on the screen surface for this purpose. If the taken picture does not satisfy, the customer can activate the camera release via the screen once or multiple times.

As described above, the franking marking image is generated, based on controlled predetermined data of the entity authorized to sell postage stamps, with interactive input by the postage stamp buyer. Based on his desires and imagination, the customer interactively adds text or graphic elements via the touch screen into the franking marking image always appearing on the touch screen online and being in the process of creation.

In principle, the provider of the device pre-selects freely, by means of the software accessible by the customer and affecting the internal processing of the hardware, which services at which price he will offer to the customer. In this connection it is only important that the provider also supplies the basic design of the franking marking. The entire programming required for these steps is purely a standard work product in view of today's software instruments. For example, images can be processed in the PC via Twain standard and texts via Word or a different software. Also known is the software required for the dialogue with the touch screen. Of course, the embodiment illustrated in the Figures is to be understood as an example only and can be changed as desired within the frame of knowledge available to a person skilled in the art. This includes, inter alia, the selection possibilities of the operating language as well as of the language of the stored slogans; the processing of retouching a photo with respect to sharpness, color, and contrast; the input of other texts and slogans; the selection of other fonts; the division of the field of the postage stamp available for free design into partial fields of any desired shape; the application of lines or other auxiliary means on the postage stamps which facilitate subsequent separation of the individual areas from the official portion. Conceivable are

also auxiliary means such as changing of the size of the photo (by zooming) or the overlay and underlay of photos and texts. Of course, a text or another object can be input via the camera. This, for example, may be very relevant. It is also conceivable that the basic design of the postage stamp provided by the post office can vary as a function of the postage stamp value.

In regard to the device, favorable embodiments are also conceivable in which one or more of the elements (for example, camera, coin changer) are eliminated. In a minimalized embodiment, the housing and printer can be the only required elements. For example, the PC can be replaced by a freely programmable or even fixedly programmed control electronic and the touch screen by discrete inputting elements, for example, switches.

The device 20, as is illustrated in Fig. 5, can be made available for self-service or can be integrated into mailing devices or postage meter machines.